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APPLICATION FOR UNITED STATES LETTERS PATENT

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TITLE: FLAG-INSPIRED ORNAMENT
WITH INFORMATION FIELD,
MOBILE ADVERTISING
ORNAMENT HAVING FIRST AND
SECOND MESSAGE FIELDS, AND
SPRING MOUNTS THEREFORE

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**FLAG-INSPIRED ORNAMENT WITH INFORMATION FIELD,
MOBILE ADVERTISING ORNAMENT HAVING FIRST AND
SECOND MESSAGE FIELDS, AND SPRING MOUNTS
THEREFORE**

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PRIORITY

This application claims priority of U.S. Provisional Patent Application
Serial Number 60/393,510, filed June 28, 2002, which is specifically
incorporated by reference as if reproduced in full below.

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FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to devices and methods for providing information,
and in a particular embodiment is directed to a United States Flag-inspired
spherical ornament conveying a patriotic message having an information field
for communicating additional information.

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

FLAGS IN ADVERTISING

Advertisers and others desiring to communicate a message must find a
way to gain the attention of the public. This is frequently done by use of
familiar images and personalities. Patriotic images and the message they
convey can be particularly effective in attracting attention. For example, U.S.
flags are flown at many business establishments in the United States to send

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a patriotic message and to draw attention to the establishment. In other words, a familiar or popular message is used to draw attention to less familiar messages. Further, U.S. flag-inspired garments are now seen throughout the world, as are those inspired by the flags of other nations. Flag bumper
5 stickers and miniature flags are ubiquitous, reflecting a desire shared by many individuals to demonstrate their support for the message conveyed by the corresponding flag. It is also common to see French, Mexican or other type of foods and restaurants being marketed by use of a colored pattern inspired by the French flag, Mexican flag, or other national flag.

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ANTENNA BALLS IN ADVERTISING

Antenna balls are small spherical ornaments that are mounted on the top of an antenna shaft. They have been used by gas stations, fast food chains and other franchises to advertise their services for many years. Over
15 the past few years, antenna balls have increased in popularity. More and more businesses use the balls as a marketing tool by placing their name, trademark, and/or advertising slogan on the balls, or by decorating and/or shaping the balls to look like unique characters that are associated with their company's identity.

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For cars that do not have an antenna, antenna balls, known as danglers, are available with a loop that can be used to hang the ornament

from the rear view mirror of a car, among other places. There are a variety of other uses of antenna balls, such as for pen and pencil toppers.

Antenna "balls" now come in non-spherical sculptures, some with unique "personalities." COOLBALLS® antenna balls, dangles, and toppers, are the best examples of this creative trend. COOLBALLS® of San Carlos, California, founded by Lisa Sievers, is a leader in the creation of fanciful and fun antenna balls, dangles, and toppers that allow people to express their personality in their car, school and office. Their "cool" designs are viewable at <http://www.coolballs.com>.

COOLBALLS® offers ancillary products. Various examples of embodiments of antenna balls and picture frames are provided at the web site <http://www.coolballs.com>, or can be obtained from promotional literature provided by COOLBALLS® of San Carlos, California.

While increasing numbers of companies have used antenna balls as marketing tools, it is necessary to draw attention to the ornament to get the advertising message noticed, creating a need for such ornaments to appeal to greater percentages of members of the public. Thus, there is a need to improve the ability of antenna balls, dangles, toppers and other ornaments to send a message as desired by the sender. Further, there is a need to find other ways in which to display such ornaments.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In an embodiment, an antenna ball, dangler, or topper is provided having a patterned portion for sending a first or popular message, and a
5 second portion for sending a customized message. In a preferred embodiment, the popular message is a patriotic message embodied in a pattern inspired by a national flag. The second portion comprises an information field, in which a second message desired to be communicated is placed.

10 In another aspect, the present invention is directed to a spring mount with a surface attachment mechanism for displaying the ornaments of the present invention on a wide variety of surfaces. The spring mount may also be used to create a unique display device, in which a picture frame is mounted on the spring mount.

15 The present invention may be better understood by reference to the figures and further detailed description below.

DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

20 Figures 1 through 4 are a front, back, side and top view of an exemplary antenna ball formed in accordance with the present invention.

Figure 5 is a side elevation view of a spring mount in accordance with the present invention.

Figures 6 is a view of COOLBALLS® “antenna balls” mounted on a spring mount of the type illustrated in Figure 5.

Figures 7 and 8 illustrate a variety of COOLBALLS® COOLTOPPERS® picture frames mounted on a spring mount of the type illustrated in Figure 5.

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FURTHER DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

AMERICAN FLAG-INSPIRED EMBODIMENT

With reference to Figures 1 through 4, an embodiment of an ornament
10 in accordance with the present invention is provided. Sphere 10 has a first
message portion 100 and a second message portion 200. First message
portion 100 is inspired by the flag of the United States of America, and
includes a dark field 110 upon which light colored stars 112 are
superimposed, and a striped field 114. Striped field 114 contacts two sides of
15 the dark field 110. In a preferred embodiment, dark field 110 is blue, stars
112 are white, and the stripes are red upon a background of the same white
hue as stars 112. Striped field 114 is preferably three sided, rather than four
sided, which the present inventor discovered better accommodate the
curvature of sphere 10.

20 Second message portion 200 can be smaller or larger than shown in
the Figures, and can be of a solid color or a uniform pattern. It may include a
border to highlight the transition from the first field, or the transition can be via

a gradual blending of the field edges. In a preferred embodiment, second message portion 200 is white. An exemplary message U.S.A. is provided in Figure 4 just to demonstrate how an image could be displayed. However, the message is considered redundant in the view of the patriotic message already sent by the flag. In embodiments of the present invention, advertisements, trademarks, company names, or other messages appear in the information or second field. Hence, the well known American Flag inspired design in the first field acts to draw the attention of viewers to the lesser known message in the second field.

Generally antenna balls, dangles and toppers have a diameter of between 1 and 2 inches, but much larger or smaller sizes are envisioned for ornaments in accordance with the present invention. For example, key chains could incorporate smaller sizes, and balloons and large balls for sports can be made. As the balls get smaller, the size of the fields, stripes, and stars would be reduced. Further, the number of stars might be altered. For example, for a sphere having a diameter of about $1\frac{1}{2}$ to about $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches, the present inventor has found that a plurality of stars ranging from about 2 to about 10 is optimum, and in a preferred embodiment six stars are used. Larger or smaller numbers of stars can be used, and will likely increase for larger spheres.

In a preferred embodiment, ornaments of the present invention are formed of ethyl vinyl acetate (EVA). However, other materials may be used.

For example, an ornament for a key chain could be made of metal or glass or other more durable material.

For a sphere having a diameter of about $1 \frac{3}{4}$ inches, the present inventor has found that a plurality of stripes, ranging from about 2 to about 10 is optimum. The number of stripes can increase with sphere size. The present inventor has also found that, where the dark field is three sided, the striped field should preferably contact the right side 116 of the dark field and its base 118. In a preferred embodiment, there are six white stars on a blue background, preferably arranged so that three stars are parallel to each side, and at least three red stripes on a white background. The dark field in a preferred embodiment has three sides of equal length (approximating an equilateral triangle) wherein the length is about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the sphere circumference, thus resulting in a dark field contiguously covering about $\frac{1}{8}$ of the surface of the sphere. Referring to Figures 1 through 4, it can be seen that in a preferred embodiment, the striped field takes up $\frac{3}{8}$ of the surface of the sphere with the combined dark field and striped field covering about one hemisphere (i.e., half of the sphere surface area).

FLAGS OF OTHER NATIONS

In an alternative embodiment, the flags of other nations are used to inspire designs for the first message field (the first message portion may also

be referred to as "the familiar message field" or "the attention grabbing field"), or the entire flag of a nation may cover all or a substantial part of a sphere with a second or target message field being formed by the area of the sphere not covered by the flag design or flag-inspired design, or in the alternative the second message field can be superimposed on an area of the first message field.

FAMOUS CHARACTERS, PERSONALITIES, WORKS OF ART, AND TRADEMARKS

In an alternative embodiment of the present invention, famous or popular characters, personalities, trademarks, and/or works of art can be used as the first message field to draw attention to the ornament. For example, in an embodiment, a COOLBALLS® Cool Sun design comprises a sphere upon which sunglasses are mounted. An information field can be included on the opposite side of the sphere from the sunglasses, which may be of the same color as the rest of the sphere, with the image or words in a contrasting color.

It is noted that many antenna balls include a copyright notice or other indication of origin around or near a mounting hole in the bottom of the sphere. This notice must be distinguished from the first and second fields of the present invention, as the notice is located in a position designed not to distract from the general appearance and principal message sent by the ball;

hence the first field is designed to draw attention to the second field without the "notice field" substantially detracting attention from either the first or second fields. For example, the notice on COOLBALLS® antenna balls is only about 0.5 inches in diameter, and is located on the "bottom" of the ball where the antenna mast receptacle is located. In contrast, the first message field of the present invention is designed to draw attention to the ornament and to consequently draw attention to the message contained in the second message field. Thus, it is to be understood that the present invention excludes provision of such notices in an area preferably consuming no more than about 2 square inches, and most preferably about 0.8 square inches, on a sphere having a diameter of about 1.75 inches, with the notice excluded hereby having a proportionate ratio of size to sphere surface area as the size increases or decreases. In the alternative, such a "notice" message can be considered as a third message.

The present invention also excludes redundant first and second message fields, such as where at least one of a character, name, symbol or logo associated by the public with a company, nation, cause, or entity is present in a first field and at least one of a character, name, symbol or logo associated by the public with a company, nation, cause, or entity is present in a second field, with no further message appearing in either field. In the alternative, where the ornament first message is a trademark, character,

slogan, design, personality or art work associated with a particular company, the "notice" can be considered as a third message. The term "well known message" in referring to a first message field on an advertising ornament of the present invention refers to a message that a segment of a population likely to view the ornament will consciously or unconsciously recognize as having some familiarity. For example, the flags of countries or other entities or colored patterns representative thereof, famous brands, and/or famous characters would constitute a "well known message."

In a preferred embodiment, an ornament is used to link separate branded items. For example, a movie character's likeness could be used as a first field, with a second field drawing attention to an upcoming movie, or the name and/or image of an item for sale or of interest, such as a car, clothing, beverage, or website.

Statistically, a "well known message" can be linked to marketing surveys in target markets, defined by geographical, age, and socioeconomic groupings. For example, in a particular geographical area, and for a predefined socioeconomic group of a predefined age range, a survey showing that at least 1% of such group, and most preferably at least 10%, have some familiarity with a first message field, would qualify the field as well known.

Familiarity does not require that the viewer can identify the first field or the source, rather that it elicits some familiarity sufficient to attract attention to the

second field. For example, a first field showing a well known cartoon character could be used on a vehicular antenna ornament with a second field directed to a wide variety of commercial product or other messages.

Thus, the present invention also discloses a new and unique method of mobile advertising, wherein for example antenna ornaments (which shall
5 include mirror dangles) include a first well known field to attract attention to a second unknown or lesser known information field. In an embodiment of the present invention, a first well known mark of a first commercial entity, or other character or design associated with a first commercial entity is provided in the
10 first field, with a second message directed to a second commercial entity.

Hence, in accordance with the present invention a movie studio or publisher can license its characters for use in the first field of an antenna ball to a second commercial entity, wherein a message from the second commercial entity is included in the second field. Famous athletes or teams could also
15 use their images or emblems as the first field. In an embodiment, the second field includes a message directed to a product of a third party that has paid a fee to the owner of intellectual property rights in the movie, cartoon character, or other creative device used in the first field to use said character.

SPRING MOUNT

In an embodiment of the present invention, the ornaments of the present invention can be displayed on a variety of surfaces via use of a unique spring mount. Referring to Figure 5, an embodiment of a spring mount of the present invention is depicted. The mount 300 comprises a stand 310 with an adhesive and/or other surface attachment mechanism 320 (e.g., magnet, suction cup, or VELCRO[®]) that has a top surface that connects to and supports a flexible and resilient shaft 330, which in a preferred embodiment is made of a tightly coiled wire.

The diameter of the coil approximates that of standard antenna stalks. In a preferred embodiment, the shaft is about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in diameter, and has about 6 coils per inch. The base can be of plastic, such as a $\frac{3}{4}$ inch diameter disk 335, with a mounting sleeve 340 into which the bottom of the spring shaft is inserted. An adhesive can be applied to the bottom of the base, and covered with a polymeric sheet that can be removed by the user to attach the mount to a surface. A flat magnetic sheet can be adhered to the bottom of the base to permit attachment to ferromagnetic materials, such as steel filing cabinets, etc.

With reference to Figures 6, 7 and 8, a sculpture, such as antenna ball 400 and antenna ball 402, or a display device, such as a picture frame 404, can be detachably mounted on the top of the flexible shaft. The flexibility of

the shaft permits very small surface vibrations and air movements in the surrounding environment to move the ball or picture frame, thus increasing the amount of attention drawn to the ornament or picture frame. To some, it gives the appearance that the ornament or person in a picture is waving at you. With reference to Figure 7, in a preferred embodiment, a variety of fancifully shaped picture frames available from COOLBALLS® are mounted on the shaft. Preferred picture frames are formed of EVA polymer.

A preferred embodiment of a spring mount of the present invention is the COOLBALLS® BUDDIES™ spring mount, available from COOLBALLS®.

While exemplary embodiments of the present invention have been set forth above, it is to be understood that the pioneer inventions disclosed herein may be constructed or used otherwise than as specifically described.